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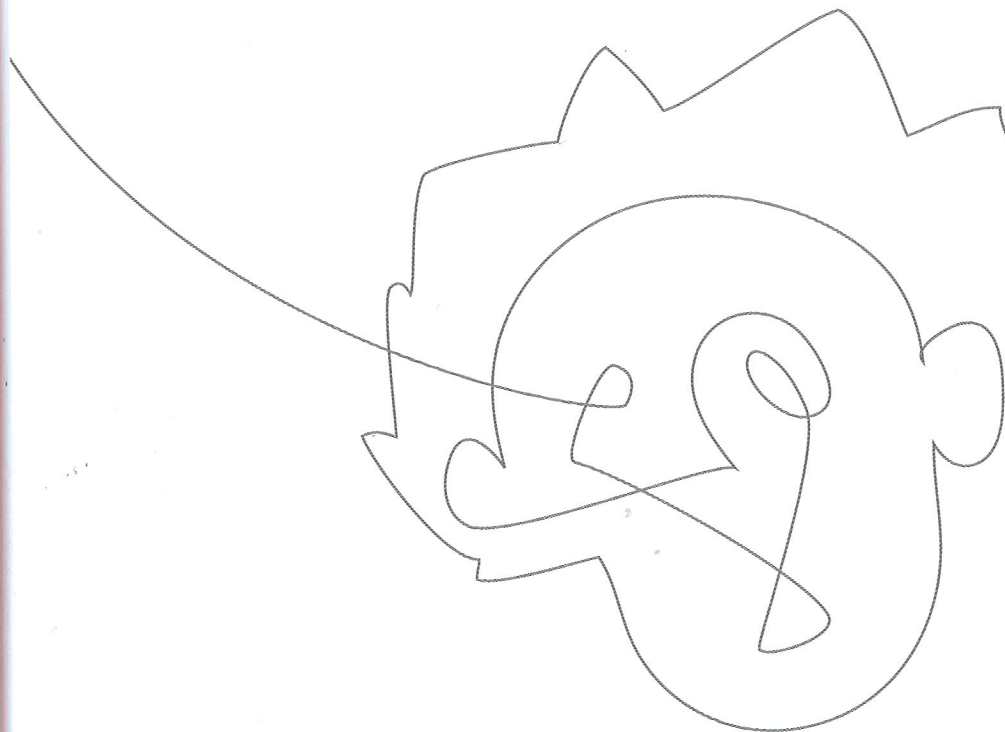
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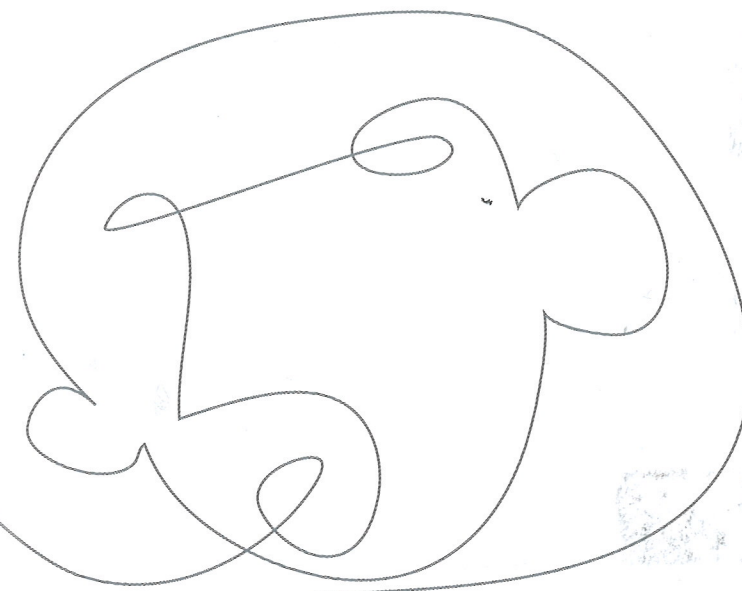
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How might Design avoid the over-development of Care?

David Coyles & Yutaka Yoshinaka



YY: So, 'How might Design avoid the over-development of Care?' One way we might want to approach this is to try to understand what the statement/question might mean? For Design to avoid, or even hit some intended target, it must be a process in keeping with meeting goals and requirements that were set out from the beginning. Is this reflective of how Design unfolds?

DC: I think it might be, but these are very big terms we are dealing with in this question and I wonder if it is even possible to talk about it without having to qualify these terms a little bit? Because, my first reaction is how do you think about Design as a 'process' where you meet some set of 'outcomes'? How would you even define and measure the 'over-development' of Care? That's difficult. These are huge philosophical questions and I wonder if they can be spoken about in the abstract?

YY: Trying to open up the connotations in the question, in exploring Design as a process; what would it mean to 'avoid', and what would it mean to 'develop'? And also, following that, what would it mean to 'avoid over-developing'?

DC: And following that again, I suppose, what do we mean by Care?

YY: I understood from previous discussions (i.e. before this Workshop) about Design and Care, that there can be 'Caring in Design' (the process) but also 'Designing with Care'. But the way it's formulated in this particular question it seems like Care is the product.

DC: Ok, so taking that lead, let's start with a hypothetical. With a company like Apple for instance, is thinking about how the user experience extends from the use of the actual product (the conventional focus of Design) all the way to how that user also feels even in the act of just opening the packaging of the product. This act of opening then becomes an equally important part of the user experience. As commercially orientated as it is, is that an aspect of Care?

YY: From my vantage point and from my experience as an educator, yes, that indeed would also be an aspect of Care. Specifically translated into a notion of user experience. But, it's only one aspect. And if I might develop two things in regard to that. Firstly, that example or delimitation to packaging design and user experience does not cater to the use of resources that some actors (and even the user) in another context might find relevant. So, in that sense, the user experience becomes a very 'fluffy' notion. Secondly, in that same product (let's say it's an iPhone) the kind of Care that is put into the packaging does not necessarily enter into the Care of how the product is materialised. There's a tension there where users are not privy to certain parts or aspects of the product. These tensions might help to inform a developing notion of Care, in that Care can be ambiguous and complex and a ground for contestation. Not in the abstract, but in ways that are both empirically grounded and theoretically framed. I think this goes very much toward addressing questions of over-development and the notion of 'avoiding' or what it actually does mean to 'avoid'. Through your example and its simplicity, we can broach two or three really intriguing

aspects and ambiguities in how we frame Care.

DC: I find it hard, in any kind of framing, to divorce our analysis from the pervasive capitalist sensibilities that underpin contemporary democracies. That's why I bring up the example of Apple. More and more it has become apparent to me, just as a casual observer in the different industries that I have worked in, how Design has gradually become another 'thing' that business can use to 'do things better'. Sometimes I guess it could be reasonably argued that there are altruistic reasons for this, but my cynical tendencies tell me that more typically it is done to make more money. We live in a world where Economists, investment banks, big conglomerates and global operators like KPMG all hire Designers so that they can bring 'Design Thinking' to innovate their working practices. The example of Apple is almost a microcosm of the fusing of Design and consumerism that I think about when considering what the over-development of Care might mean. I immediately thought not only of the boxing of the actual product, but also of the packaging waste and the sustainability of those materials. Where were those specific materials manufactured and by whom? Was it by Foxconn? And, if so, what does that mean about labour conditions for example? All of a sudden it balloons into this map of ambiguities. The over-development of Care is almost analogous to something that is over-ripe. In this way of thinking, Design would need to be more aware of its role within that bigger complex. Perhaps it is already too late. Perhaps it has already become a commodity within the system, as opposed to an extrinsic force acting on that system.

YY: So, we can see that things start to unravel somewhat, in terms of there being different issues that relate to what might have started out as a very 'user-centric' framing of the idea of product packaging by Apple. Where does that leave us with the notion of Care? It seems that, on one hand, Care is being leveraged by some actors involved in the Design in attending to the user experience with the packaging as a vital link in the business understanding, from a very specific vantage point. On the other hand, the user is excluded and not allowed to engage in, or 'Care' for, the ways in which the company pursues its other business orientations and interests without regard to the user per se. That to me is paradoxical. Do we want to leverage Care as something productive, that we can take stock

of and work with? Or, do we actually want to be quite attentive to the ambiguities and the pitfalls there might be when Care is also part of this commercialisation? We do not want to fall into the trap of being blind to some aspects in which Care is involved whilst also not really managing to facilitate or encourage Care. I have some issues with this kind of tension because I would not like Design to become normative in this regard, where we say that this is the way we should Care. On what premise would such a grounding be based? There are constellations of values that might be contested, not just in terms of business vs. users, but for instance, across different cultures, and we need to be attentive to how we might bring that in.

DC: Unpacking these ambiguities is crucial. From a philosophical perspective it is fundamentally difficult to say that anything is true. It is perhaps more useful then to explore these ambiguities and expose the latent assumptions that are made in any given process. Even in an example such as Apple and their approach to Product Design, I was thinking about just how ambiguous it is. We have products that can be so 'well designed' that you now can't actually get access to their inner-workings and components to repair them and prolong their use. What does this mean for Care? What accounts for the associated waste and the extra costs? Those things are almost hidden behind a veil of marketing and aesthetics. I was reading recently about Apple's target to close the material-loop of their products, transitioning to a point where everything can be recycled and re-used. But again, is that just another commercial move where Design is co-opted into a system where a product cannot be repaired but it can be recycled? This provides another window into this bigger world of contradictions where Design has almost become an instrument that is in vogue. A tool to be applied.

YY: Just one comment on this closed loop initiative. We could say, why do they delimit the thought to closed-loop material circulation? Electronics are only a specific part of their offerings, so how is a concept such as sustainability configured in this loop? The impact is also thereby specific. So, would it not be relevant in terms of Care to unravel or make explicit the assumptions in their delimitation to electronics? What is Apple's specific way into Design (and Care)? What are their goals with Design? What are

their short-term ambitions and business orientations, as opposed to more long-term alignments to sustainability and community agendas?

DC: That makes me think, what would happen if you remove the commercial gain? What would be the motivating factors that would encourage thoughts for sustainability or Care of the communities where materials are sourced? What would any set of actors in that sector to begin to value other ways of doing it? This might sound idealistic, or perhaps even naïve, but might be possible to work with the different cultures and communities, currently immersed in the manufacture of these products, to develop ways of managing resources more carefully? But what would provoke that?

YY: It's just an assumption from my side, but I should think that business would only take it upon itself if it would provide an advantage in terms of competitors or those who might be/become competitors in the future, but only in so far as if it may be of priority in relation to other competitive advantages they might have already. Perhaps this is a somewhat cynical approach to things, but in the spirit of sustainability and shrinking resources, it might make business sense to do things differently. Perhaps something of potential competitive advantage, for instance, years earlier? It might even have been on a list of possibilities but not really prioritised. In that sense, businesses tend to go for a lot of mileage with little effort. But I am not sure about the non-business side of things. What is our take on it? What would consumers actually get out of it? If Care tends more towards being a gimmick that serves business rather than anything meaningful, what would consumers gain from that?

DC: Are we saying that unless there is a different political system, then we are doomed to repeating the same? That there is always going to be a cynical motivation? Is that really so?

YY: Well, from a Design vantage point, I think we need to have different issues, a heterogeneity of concerns, that can be synthesised or can be framed in a way that they cohere, so that it's not 'just' about recycling or about an identified need. That it gives value(s) in different respects, and perhaps even contested and ambiguous sets of values. That different actors

would value different things but would have a stake in them in different ways that would somehow cohere. I would not exclude that, in such a contestation of values, there might be certain actors that get more out of it than others. But, trying to integrate heterogeneous concerns is part of the process of Caring 'in' and Caring 'with' Design. Being aware of how issues manifest as a result of the process, but also as a result. How they manifest through the Design being in use, or in the act of discarding or recycling as extended uses of the Design. These are aspects that need to be taken stock of as part of the Design process, short of saying that Design determines what manifests. So, when we say something about 'how might Design avoid the over-development of Care', we are already talking against the notion that Design can determine anything at all. Design can, perhaps, make plausible certain relations and outcomes more than others because of the way that Design makes a difference. But that's only half of the equation. How users and other actors engage with the Design - whether a product or a service or an architecture - is also part of how we need to understand Care.

DC: Very much so. That raises some parallels with my experiences in Architecture where you might think about the social conscience that you should have as a Designer. I don't know how much Design education touches on that? I'm sure it varies, but in conventional Architectural education it wouldn't be very much, and when you march forward into employment, into the commercial sector, it's very difficult to hold onto those values. But it does raise the question - is this something that is taught and adequately discussed in education at the moment? That I don't know.

YY: I think that, at least from some of the more Science and Technology Studies (STS) orientated approaches to designing and 'learning through Design projects', there is some recognition of political activism and, on a more general level, the sensitising of Design students towards the realities of the world as a place that is lived and experienced by others. Where the world is a plurality and not just one reality. One example that I am aware of from research is about a project where Architecture students set about investigating the impact of the built environment on wheelchair users by immersing themselves within the infrastructure of the inner-city to try to capture the experience of how someone in a wheelchair might actually experience that built environment. So, these ideas about harnessing the

'lived experience' and how that might actually feedback into the teaching process, and reorganise or restructure ideas about 'lived cities', is in one sense being taught by some, but it is certainly not mainstream. One of the things that is also interesting is how these emergent trends in the field, buzzwords like 'Empathy' and how we talk about Care in Design, are very much at play at the prototyping stage. That is to say, not in the sense of prototyping before launch, but prototyping as an iterative and generative process from the outset. This begs the question of just how do we prototype that kind of 'lived experience, for both the Designers to work with in abstract 'thinking ways' but also in very concrete ways? And, perhaps more importantly, how might iterative prototyping allow other actors to become engaged in the process from very early on so that they can facilitate a dialogue about what things mean and how it might make a difference beyond the original scope and mindset of the Designers? Of course, this has the potential to complexify things and make them more ill-structured as there is no kind of checklist to work with, but it also opens up different ways of working with different kinds of actors and knowledges. The more you progress towards a level of completion or fruition, the less and less the window of opportunity for 'making a difference' becomes because this aspiration is now invested in the process. But that also means that it is much harder to do things earlier in the process and that is where the alternative of generative prototyping might make a difference at the educational level. But these ideas are still at the very early stages. Businesses would probably not have the patience to work with something like that. They would like to test something definitive whereas generative prototyping is not about testing. It is about dialogue, about reframing and qualifying; Did we understand what the problem or opportunity was? Do we have a deeper understanding of what it is we are actually working with? That is where Care might come in. Care as a 'Caution' or a 'Concern' or a 'Set of Concerns'.

DC: To me, the over-development of Care then begins to emerge from whenever there is an unmitigated ambiguous and contradictory proliferation of Care. Where Care has become part of the established business ecosystem. Where you are no longer self-aware of what those core values of critically-aware Design might have been. Where those values are now consumed and normalised by business practices. This is why education

is so important. Imagine your first introductory Design lectures in 'Design 101' focused on the 'neoliberal capitalist-democracy' that we are working within today and what Design means within that system. You would probably be very confused, and I doubt that this is what you would expect. In my own teaching, even to first-year architectural undergraduates, I try to avoid abstracting Design from the real world and instead fully embed Design within it. And perhaps, without trying to dash the hopes and dreams of students completely, show that it is very difficult to make a difference, and reveal instead just how complex the world really is. Of course, there is always the danger of scaring people away by shattering the ideals that students might have about their future role as a Designer. It becomes more of a question about when you actually begin to teach that way of thinking. I agree there are emerging trends in the curriculum, but the curriculum seems to be lagging so far behind where the world is at right now. Industry seems to be way ahead with realising where (usually for cynical means) Design can go. Education seems to be still catching up to those concepts. Yet, education is actually the perfect setting for radical and provocative thinking.

YY: When we consider all of this, it seems that there must be some driving forces which have played a part in making 'Design Thinking' palatable to Industry. Interestingly, Intel, for example, has been very good at bridging the Academic-Industrial divide around the idea of Empathy towards users, leveraging debate about topics such as Ethnography, not just regarding how users behave in ways that are interesting to Designers, but about what it means Ethnographically to study practices. But, in terms of educating young undergraduates, it is of course about not completely crushing their dreams but also about making them competent from early-on in their professional development so that they can build upon this as their career progresses. One of the challenges for me and for many colleagues as educators, was that we could dedicate a lot of effort to first-year students but if there was no one to take things on in succession they would then stifle somewhere and become seduced by more 'commercial' and 'less reflective' ways of working. So, there is a definite and important issue there. However, I remain hopeful and actually quite optimistic. Many students would come into our programme saying, 'I want to be a Designer' or 'I want to be an Innovator' and believing that they already had the best idea or the best

solution. But very early on we managed to somehow get them to learn to always be a little more critical, not just of their own work, but of the others and of preconceived ways of thinking about the future. To give one example that relates to this business dimension we have been discussing, many of our third-year undergraduate projects are done in collaboration with NGOs or even with Industry (where of course the realisation of profit is a concern). One of these projects involved students being asked to redesign two assistive devices that are used to help people with brain injuries to raise themselves up from a seated position to a standing-upright position. One of these devices was a device to lean-on, the other was a mobile device with wheels. The business that wanted the project done wanted a device that was a combination of the two. So, we approached this thinking that 'we don't know what the results are going to be, but we will look at it and we will work with you on it'. At the first milestone meeting, about five weeks into what was a fifteen-week project, the students had identified a few specific areas that they wanted to discuss with the business collaborators. These were mainly about where the problem issues might be and also some really nice 'nuggets' about how things could be different - without going into a solution mode. The business partner said, 'Oh, that's interesting... but, those three aspects that you are really concrete about... do you know if anyone has taken out a patent on them?' What was rewarding for me was that the third-year students had learned to say, let's be a little bit cautious; these issues might just be symptomatic; they might not be things that we need to actually work with. I had tried to teach them that there is no such thing as a 'root cause' and no 'one-to-one relationship'. As a Designer you have to qualify between those things that are symptoms and those things that are more fundamental. In this sense, the students were actually trying to convince these business people not to be hasty, that 'we're not there just quite yet'. For me, that shows promise. In our teaching with first-year undergraduates, the idea was very much to give them an appreciation of (in a fluid sense and not a restrictive sense) just who is it that they are designing for. For example, in an early project where they are trying to understand children's playgrounds in public parks, there was a realisation that some play-things are not being maintained and some have become quite dangerous to play on, having been neglected over time. And even whilst children play, the students appreciate that some children like to play quietly while others were active. The question there is how do you

deal with these kinds of tensions in play situations and in designed objects; who is it we are actually designing for? Some of the students catch on quite quickly. They think about situations where you might have children at three or four years playing in the playground, with parents just standing watching. These students then begin to think, Why are they just watching? Why are they not engaging in the play? Can we devise something so that the parents can interact with one another rather than just watch their own kids? This was especially relevant to certain multicultural neighbourhoods of Copenhagen where there is the opportunity for parents to interact across their cultures. So, in a very roundabout way, we are trying to give students a sense that they are designing not for a person, but different aspects of different ways of thinking. And within this there is of course a need to include the Municipality responsible for the public grounds and the playground equipment. There is a need for them to become open to the idea of the playground being something different and not simply limited by the EU standards that govern the Design of certain playground artefacts and instruments. We wanted our students to try and understand these sorts of issues from the get-go, so that when they present their products or concepts they are aware of how different parties can see themselves reflected in the solution in different ways - without these parties really being aware that that is what they were looking for. This can help these parties to feel included. It's not about saying 'we want this and this and this done' but 'these are our concerns', where even if they might have suggested something, they are actually participating and somehow transforming the process. That's one of the ways that I think we have tried to instil Care in our Design teaching. But it becomes really tough in the ensuing years as we try to equip students to deal with the world of business and their ways of cutting straight to questions of patents and so on. That's not the way we want to serve users and there are a whole set of concerns that simply do not align with business interests. Education is somewhat disparately trying to deal with that, though not in a way that currently follows through into programmes and curriculum. But there are hopeful signs that it is possible to do. The question is more about whether we should do that early on in the education process. I think this is possible, but it has to be fully followed through as training progresses, which is actually a really tough thing to achieve.

DC: One of the things that struck me from the examples that you just gave was when you talked about how your students presented little 'nuggets' about a particular problem. I often think that these little 'nuggets' are all you can really hope to understand in those sorts of instances. To use the analogy again, it provides a way of opening up a window onto just how unbelievably complex things really are. That is the sort of thing that I was thinking about in terms of how education might respond. It is not about a fundamental shift in the philosophy of education. Rather, it is about embracing a philosophy where the world is recognised as a complex system, where you can hope to understand tiny little bits of it, one bit at a time. Maybe in that way of thinking, these ideas about Care can then come through more strongly. This all takes place however, within a context where a dominant commercial sector wants to know about the patent and how quickly they can get a product to market. And we know that in response to this dominance, universities offer many courses about being 'business aware' as Designers and on Entrepreneurship and so forth. But these days Designers are also being brought in at management level, so that the Designer can now bring their 'Design Skills' and apply these ways of thinking to the management of previously unrelated areas such as 'Inventory' and 'Human Resources'. They are bringing Design Thinking to business and to management. I think that is something crucial that is not really being touched on in a meaningful way at university.

YY: It's the reality that as a Designer, you are dealing with people.

DC: Yes, and perhaps the reality is that everything we have talked about today is inherently Anthropological. Maybe that is an assumption that we already inherently understand? But, at the end of the day, it is hard to divorce Design from people. Those two things can be seen to bookend what we would want education to do; there is at one end, the socially-aware Designer with their value system, who can come to terms with understanding both the aesthetics and the fact that the world is indeed a complex place and you can understand one 'nugget' at a time. At the other, there is this idea where, as a Designer, you have a distinct philosophy of the world that you can apply anywhere, not just in Design. Design is actually a way of thinking about the world. That's the part that I think Industry has caught onto really well now.

YY: Would you call it 'instrumental'?

DC: Yes, I think it is all about Design becoming instrumentalised. You can imagine the scene in the boardroom; 'We need a Designer in here to give us a fresh look at things... now!' Then it all becomes jargonised. That's the 'over-development of Care' once again, the 'over-ripeness'. Where it's now part of the system, everywhere. Where Design is the 'new normal'.

YY: This is just a small thing, but in the Danish tradition of understanding Design it has long been primarily concerned with aesthetics and to giving form more generally, i.e. Design as sometimes thought of as the 'finishing touches'. That in itself is bad enough. But here we are thinking about how Design becomes instrumental and how it becomes very incisive, and not in a very productive way. In order to remain productive, it should attend to matters of concern (to borrow Bruno Latour's phrase), for how people work together in organisations, or how a product 'becomes what it becomes'. So, for me there are two extremes. One is all about going in and doing the 'facelift' through the Design. The other is about going in (in not a very reflective way) and meddling with processes that would otherwise be productive.

DC: You use the word 'reflective' and that is important. I think that if you lose that ability to be reflective, you lose one of the strategies that might be used to avoid the over-development of Care. That might be one way of thinking about it; if there is this constant interrogation, where we are always willing to stand back, willing to throw out all assumptions and preconceptions and start again. Not becoming lost in this notion that we have reached a heady period where Design has attained its zenith, where it has fully become part of the wider cultural ecosystem. Some of our greatest philosophers would tell us that this is exactly when we have to be most cautious and most critical. If everybody is now talking about Design, that should scare the hell out of everyone.

YY: If we think about 'being reflective' as an integral part of Design, and a way to work with things and with people, for me that is exactly what Design is. It is iterative. It wants to be constantly seeking, broadening and deepening through divergent processes. You could call it 'ways of thinking'

if you want, but there is also a lot of materiality and thinking in prototyping the convergent synthetic processes. There is also iteration, going back when you have a set of problems that you synthesise through the work but where you perhaps start to think, are these really distinct issues or opportunities, are we missing an iteration where we can reframe them and they become inclusive or exclusive? Iterating and generating things productively, and discarding ideas within a process that permits them to sneak back in later in a more meaningful way, for me these concepts are included in the notion of Design. Not in the instrumental sense where they can be leveraged for 'quick-fixes', but where it is embedded in the thinking and the set-up. Any response to a question such as 'How do we avoid the over-development of Care?' must encompass that notion of Design.